



## 2021 Annual Report Narrative

### Overview

This narrative will provide brief descriptions/snap-shot on priorities, projects and initiatives undertaken in 2021. It will focus on the priorities outlined in the Recovery Planning Technical Assistance the board undertook in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2021. In addition this narrative will provide a list of efforts/accomplishments based on our original Business Workplan. While we have not yet converted to the Refresh Model and Transformational Strategies, we have made an effort to have crossover and collaboration between Main Street points on projects.

### Ortonville DDA Business Workplan

Since 2017, using the annual business workplan as a guide, the DDA's strategy has been to shift our priorities and focus to board, business and community development. This plan provides direction and assists in our decision-making. Since its adoption, the DDA Board and Volunteers have conducted planning exercises to evaluate the year-ending, identifying successes, areas of underperforming, hurdles/obstacles and priorities moving forward.

### 2021 Business Workplan Priorities & Linked Initiatives.

From the annual planning exercise, the DDA Board focused on generating primary and secondary priorities for 2021. Our 2021 exercise used the NMSC's Recovery Planning Technical Service to survey the community and develop our Recovery Planning Dashboard of priorities for the year. In addition to the Dashboard, the following Business Workplan priorities were in focus throughout 2021:

- Business Development Program - The DDA will build and facilitate a comprehensive Business Development Program that will spur economic development, provide tools and resources to existing businesses, recruit potential new businesses and engage consumers.
- In partnership with the Village, the DDA will help reimagine and reinvent public and green spaces in downtown Ortonville through a Place-Making Initiative.
- The DDA will create long-term sustainability through Financial Diversification that reallocates existing revenue sources, secures alternative revenue sources, and fosters sound financial management.

### Recovery Planning

The goal of our Recovery Planning was to help inform a thoughtful and strategic response to the lifting of business restrictions and stay at home orders in your community. The premise is that Main Streets can't simply press the restart button on their current workplans. The environment for downtown revitalization has fundamentally shifted due to COVID19, with some elements only for a short period and others that recognize fundamental shifts in our work. As part of our recovery planning, we conducted a [local consumer psyche survey](#) to best understand our current environment.

### Highlighting Several 2021 Projects and Accomplishments

- [Farmers Market Task Force](#) – With success during the first two years of the Downtown Ortonville Farmers Market, it was important for the organization to conduct a review of what’s next and how we want to get there. A Task Force consisting of 8 volunteers and the Market Manager conducted several evaluating and planning exercises that allowed us to create short and potentially medium term priorities moving forward. This also allowed us to engage volunteers with a passion for enhancing our Downtown through the market. These exercises, or meeting, took place virtually on a bi-weekly schedule, beginning in February and ending in April.
- [Downtown Ortonville Social Media Impact](#) – Our [Downtown Ortonville Facebook Page](#) has grown significantly over the past 24 months, especially in 2021. The Downtown page has become the communities go-to-resource for information on activities taking place in Ortonville. Most of the growth of the page is the result of DDA Board President Courtney McClerren. Equally important has been our [Downtown Ortonville Business Group Page](#). Launched during the pandemic, this page continues to be an important communication tool for our local businesses. From resources to support the running of their business to communicating DDA projects, initiatives and events; we continue to grow the impact of this resource.
- [Mobile App](#) – new in 2021, we are using the Distrx mobile app for events. The map feature was utilized for Ladies Night Out, our Spring Market, weekly Farmers Market, Eats in the Streets Food Truck events, Witches Night Out and Small Business Saturday. Our effort in 2022 will be to promote the app to consumers to increase app users in the community. In addition, our goal should be to incorporate activities and a historical walking tour using the app.
- [Revolving Loan](#) – With septic limitations being a critical issue for the development and utilization of commercial properties in Ortonville, the DDA secured a USDA Rural Business Development Grant specifically to create a revolving loan program to upgrade septic systems. In 2021, the DDA built a program and application process. Our initial target properties septic upgrades are on hold and therefore, our plan is to open the program up to commercial property owners in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2022.
- [Retail Challenge](#) – After several years of starts and stops, we hosted our Retail Challenge, a competition supporting entrepreneurial start-ups or expansions designed to spur economic growth in Ortonville's historic downtown area based on our current market analysis. The start and stops were primarily caused by our septic limitations. Hosting a competition not knowing if the county health department would approve occupancy was a concern. Much of the planning and organizing is the result of one volunteer Monica Phelps who, working with the Executive Director, laid out the contest and engaged professional resources from the county and MISBDC. Initially 4 entrepreneurs applied for the competition and were invited to submit business plans for Phase 2. Ultimately, with only 2 submitting business plans, the DDA Board decided to award both with the incentive.
- [Downtown Dollars Program](#) – Not unique, but a program that is specific to Ortonville. Since its launch during the 2017 holiday season, our subsidized and now for-purchase program has generated 2, 3 and sometimes 4 times the volume of commerce compared to the value of the certificate. We ask the participating businesses to track the amount of each purchase made using a Downtown Dollar certificate. Since the launch, the DDA has reimbursed participating businesses over \$18,000 and from those transactions, more than \$48,000 in commerce has been generated! 2021 saw significant increase in volume thanks to the Consumers Energy “Our Town” matching gift card program.
- [Consumers Energy Our Town](#) – We were fortunate to partner with Consumers Energy's to support the recovery of the local shops that make our downtown home! We were fortunate to be part of their program at the end of 2020, which allowed us to push the buy-one get-one offer into the new year. In

addition, Consumers conducted the program again in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2021. As part of our Cyber Monday special offer, the Consumers Energy's Our Town dollar-for-dollar match created a Buy One Get One opportunity for our Downtown Dollars program we're calling Holiday BOGO Bucks.

- Downtown Events Returned – Purposefully, we design all our events to stroll our Downtown. Where some may host farmers markets and food truck rallies in a parking lot or park-type setting, we focus on generating exposure for our local businesses by placing our events throughout Downtown. Deemed “essential” our Farmers Market was the only event that took place in 2020. With public safety a priority and up to the last-minute adjustments taking place throughout the year, we push forward with a full schedule of events in 2021. This included:
  - Spring Garden Market – launched in 2019 as a one-day event in May, we expanded the “Show” to a multiple day “market” to expand on the market brand used by our farmers market. The Spring Garden market ran 3 consecutive Saturdays in May
  - Ortonville Farmers Market – In it’s 3<sup>rd</sup> season, we attempted to expand the market season to include June...previous years started in July. Several enhancements were included in the 2021 season including entertainment, courtesy wagons, and cooking demonstrations in conjunction with Taste the Local Difference and Genisys CU.
  - Eats in the Streets – A community favorite, our strolling food truck event through out Downtown brought hundreds of people to town each of the three times in 2021 – June, July and Sept. New this year was the July event and we themed it a BBQ Takeover.
  - Ortonville Fireworks – This event was formally organized by the Greater Ortonville Chamber but was adopted by the DDA and our non-profit partner Friends of AMOS when the Chamber folded in 2017. While it is outside the DDA district, we feel it is of great service to the community to host the Fireworks each year on the property of Brandon Middle and High Schools. Normally we have food trucks at the high school leading up to the fireworks, but for 2021, the school district felt public safety in the pandemic suggested we exclude that piece of the event. A significant effort to raise the \$12,000 for the cost of the display.
  - Witches Night Out – Our Halloween themed Ladies Night Out has become the example in the region and your know what they say...imitation is the greatest form of flattery...as several surrounding communities have tried to duplicate or create a similar event for their community.
  - Small Business Saturday & Christmas in the Village - Several modifications or additions to the traditional seasonal activities were planned to utilize the week between Small Business Saturday and Christmas in the Village for a calendar of events & activities.
    - For SBS, the DDA engaged our local newspaper to develop and subsidize a Holiday Gift Guide – pull out section of the paper. In addition, we dressed up our Downtown Dollars as a Scratch & Win Giveaway. All total, the DDA provided direct financial support to SBS totaling \$\$2,700.
    - The goal for Christmas in the Village was to focus the event on family friendly activities and condense the event to 3 hours. In order to do so, components of the event were moved to different days – i.e. Ham Dinner and tree lighting to Friday night. Huge crowds of families enjoyed a beautiful day in Downtown Ortonville
- Collaborative Projects - While the relationship between the DDA and the Village/PC has significantly improved over the past 12-24 months, the balance or fine line of who leads priority projects has caused some operational issues. Several projects, originally on the DDA’s Business Workplan are now being

lead/worked by joint committees consisting of Village Council, Planning Commission and DDA representatives...some of these include:

- Wayfinding – In Phase 2 of this initiative, we have contracted with the consulting firm, Lakoda Group to lead us through the Wayfinding phase. Phase 1 of this initiative was a municipal branding component which resulted in the rebranding of the Village and sub-units, as well as secondary brand components incorporating the Township. Both the branding and wayfinding phases have been supported by the DDA's Technical Assistance grants.
- Heritage – In 2021, the overgrown Heritage (native) Garden was deconstructed. While the visioning process is taking place, temporary steps were taken to make the space useable by planting grass seed, relocating benches and picnic tables. This also allowed us the opportunity to test out uses for the space such as live music and yard games during Downtown events.
- [Redevelopment Ready Communities](#) – The Redevelopment Communities® (RRC) process consists of several interconnected steps which are undertaken at a community's own pace. A program of the MEDC, RRC has been on the DDA and Village radar since 2017. Thanks to Village Manager, Ryan Madis in 2021 a joint committee of VC, PC and DDA representatives finally moved the program into practice.